

Colossians 3:1-4 *Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*

We have come to the midpoint in our study of Colossians. It is the midpoint in that there are two chapters behind us, and two yet before us. But much more than that, it is the midpoint between Paul’s doctrinal emphasis and his practical emphasis. Chapters 1 and 2 have spoken of our transformation into the kingdom of the Heavenly Father’s Son, and having been raised up with Him through faith in His resurrection.

Colossians 1:13 *For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.*

Colossians 2:12 *Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*

You will remember that chapter one gave us a remarkable description of the divinity and authority of the exalted Christ – the very image of God, creator of all, sustainer of all, head of the church, and the first to be raised from the dead with resurrected body. (1:15-18) The Father wanted His Son to be first in everything. It was declared in chapter one that Jesus reconciled us with the Father, through the death of His fleshly body (1:22) and redeemed us to full forgiveness through His shed blood (1:14).

It was clearly stated in both opening chapters that the Father’s clear purpose in all this was to present us “complete in Christ.”

Colossians 2:27b-28 *Christ in you is your hope of glory. And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.*

And this completeness is not just for our future in heaven, but is our present state as reconciled and redeemed.

Colossians 2:10 *And in Him [Jesus] you have been made complete.*

So the doctrinal synthesis of chapters 1 and 2 is given in the opening statement of chapter 3, namely, “*you have been raised up with Christ.*” (3:1) And the practical implication of that which follows is that we had better act like it! So our Scriptural deliberation and meditation today is to understand from this passage ...

- (1) Our 4-fold status in Christ
- (2) How we are to respond

1. OUR STATUS IN CHRIST

In the four verses under consideration today, I see mention of four positions in Christ that believers enjoy.

1. Raised up with Christ (v. 1) – identifying with His resurrection
2. Died with Christ (v. 3a) – identifying with His crucifixion
3. Hidden with Christ (v. 3b) – identifying with His burial
4. Revealed with Christ (v. 4) – identifying with His glorification

√ “Raised up with Christ” is the focus here, but resurrection only makes sense when there is death and burial that precedes it and glorification that follows it.

√ Notice that the first three – raised, died and hidden in burial - are all in the present tense. You “have been raised”, you “have died” and your life “is hidden.” Whereas the last of the four is yet in the future – “you will be revealed with Him in glory.”

√ And notice further that the first three are metaphoric, identifying with actions Christ Himself has already undertaken. Christ has died, been buried and been resurrected – all past tense. But we have only died, been buried and resurrected in a spiritual sense – all in the present tense. Our immersion in water at our baptism is a perfect symbolism of all three. We “die,” falling into the arms of the one baptizing us, are “buried” in the water, and then brought back out of the water “resurrected.”

DEATH IN CHRIST

Paul states this matter-of-factly at the beginning of verse three: “*for you have died.*” He is assuming that believers well understand this truth. We are dead to the slavery and power of sin, for we now can choose not to do so by the power of Christ in us. And we are dead to the ultimate punishment of sin, in that we are bound for heaven and not for hell. We are however NOT yet dead to the presence of sin, for we are still tempted by it and susceptible to falling into it when our connection to God is weak. That our present “death” is metaphorically connected to Jesus’ crucifixion is especially evident in Paul’s teaching to the Galatian churches:

Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*

To the Philippians Paul taught:

Philippians 1:21 *For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

And to the Colossians, here in verse 4 he simply says:

Colossians 3:4 ...Christ, who is our life ...

In simple language, the believer’s life must be “all about Christ.” He is to be our focus, our purpose, our “all in all.” Is He that for you?

BURIAL IN CHRIST

In verse three, when Paul is speaking of being “*hidden with Christ in God*” he is referring to our metaphoric burial – a burial that naturally follows a death. I recall a speaker I once heard illustrate this spiritual state of burial mentioned here in a beautiful picture. We believers have the Holy Spirit living in us. Imagine you are dead in a coffin, but the coffin is not made of wood or metal, but is the living Christ surrounding you. And further imagine that the coffin is enclosed by the mighty, loving hands of the Heavenly Father. Do you see it in your mind? – you, dead with the Spirit in you, in a coffin which is Jesus Himself, enclosed by the hands of the Father. Now that’s a coffin! And that is our metaphoric state of burial today – the Holy Spirit in us, buried in Christ who has taken our many sins away, and held in the protection of the Father’s hands.

The section in Colossians that follows, which Pastor Drew will be speaking on next week, speaks of those things we need to consider as “dead” in our life and those things we need to “take off” and “bury.” The truth is, we all have things in our life of which we need to “let go.”

REVEALED WITH CHRIST

In verse four, the picture is completed looking into our future. “*When Christ, who is our life is revealed*” refers to the time when Jesus returns in the clouds to take all believers with Him – what we commonly refer to as the “rapture.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) This is when all believers will receive their resurrection bodies – truly “revealed.” This is also the beginning of what the Scripture calls “The Day of the Lord” when the glorified Christ will be revealed as the conquering Judge and King. And this will be our revealing as well, as all followers of Christ will be returning with Him to reign on the earth.

RAISED UP WITH CHRIST

But I hasten to speak of the last of the four positions in Christ – the one mentioned at the outset of the passage, that we are “*raised up with Christ.*” This is Paul’s synthesis of the first two chapters of Colossians (indicated by the opening “*therefore*”).

The “*if*” of “*If you have been raised,*” is a challenge for the reader to indeed affirm that this is his position in Christ. And if the reader is a Christ-follower, the phrase might better be rendered, “*since you have been raised.*”

But the key question is, what does being raised up with Christ mean? Yes, we will ultimately be raised with Him in glory, but that is not the meaning here. This is a present, metaphorical “raising” of all believers, of which Paul is speaking.

√ My first thought is that we as believers are meant to live “above” the worldly life. That doesn’t mean we are “better than” others in any sense. But we have been transformed into a “new creature.” And we are meant to be different and distinct in character.

2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

√ Living “above the world” does not mean that we cloister together, sheltering ourselves from all contact with the world. Rather, we look down on the problems (yes pandemics) of this life with a different, divine perspective. God is in control. We are not victims of our circumstances, but overcomers through Him who loves us. We trust God to guide us through all difficulty, including possible (probable?) persecution.

√ “Raised up with Christ” means that we continually exercise faith, rather than fear or anxiety.

Colossians 2:12 says that we are “*raised up with Him through faith.*” After all, “*faith is the victory that overcomes the world.*” (1 John 5:4) Spiritually speaking, we can rise above our difficult circumstances in faith and hope for God to “lead us in paths of righteousness” and to the “green pastures” and “still waters” spoken of in Psalm 23. That doesn’t mean only good times will come, but it does mean that God will always be with us as our shepherd, guide and defender.

√ The world tells us to “keep looking up” in times of trouble. But God tells us to “keep looking down,” for we are “raised up with Christ.” Just as Jesus lived above the world while in the world, so can we. Just as Jesus didn’t worry for His next meal or place to lay His head, neither should we. When you have a “bird’s eye view” you can see far beyond the trees that surround you and see the forest. And when you have a “divine view” you can see beyond your personal circumstance and see that God might well have a plan beyond your own comfort.

√ Specifically, in regards to our present world health pandemic, we know God is in control He has a purpose. And He wants His children of His kingdom to give love, faith and hope to those around them, pointing each to that source of love, faith and hope, which is through Jesus the Christ. God may well use this international crisis to draw many to Himself, and if so, even this pandemic is a good (“God”) thing. And may when this pandemic has passed, may many be drawn to seek the Lord through His Church as never before. In “looking down” from God’s perspective we are to see opportunity for God’s work to be done, rather than loss of our own personal comfort and freedom.

2. HOW WE ARE TO RESPOND

Verse 1 and 2 of our passage gives us two specific ways in which we are to respond to being “raised up with Christ.” We are to ...

1. Keep seeking things above (actions)
2. Set our mind on things above (thoughts)

Let’s examine these in turn.

KEEP SEEKING THINGS ABOVE (actions)

√ “Keep seeking” is a command of action that is to continue through life and the life beyond in heaven. We are never to stop seeking after the things of Christ. And this is to be our constant and fervent pursuit. Remember the words of Jesus to His disciples in His Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 7:33 *But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things [earthly needs] will be added to you.*

Matthew 7:7 *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

A commentator named Michael Bradley makes this comment, which I affirm.

"I believe there is a direct correlation between the quality and intensity of your seeking with the Lord and how much He will interact back with you. The deeper, stronger, and more intense you seek after God – the deeper, stronger, and more intense God will come and seek after you!"

Deuteronomy 4:29 *You will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.*

If you not yet a believer, but long to find God, claim this promise as yours.

Hebrews 11:6 ... *[God] is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*

√ To “keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” implies that we are to seek out Christ as our advocate to the throne of God. We are to take our requests to the Father through our advocate, Jesus the Christ. We can never wear out our welcome to the throne of God, when seeking through Jesus.

√ To “seek the things above” is to be a diligent student of the Word of God. It is to learn all we can about what God has revealed about Himself and His kingdom. It is to strive to seek to be the best follower of Christ we can be. Again, it is a life-long pursuit yielding great reward!

SET OUR MIND ON THINGS ABOVE (thoughts)

√ If “seeking” is an action, then “setting our mind” is an attitude and a continual thinking on the things of God. We are taught here to not set our minds on the things of the earth, and yet how much of our thoughts are just that. Certainly we do have to think about our life here. But the challenge is to transcend from just thinking about our life here to God-thoughts. Our mind should be continually musing about the things of heaven and God’s goodness and grace.

Philippians 4:8 *Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell [or think] on these things.*

And Paul teaches the Philippians that this kind of thinking is an antidote to worry!

√ Just as we must discipline our bodies to do the things that are proper and moral (by the power of God), so we must discipline our minds to think the things that are proper and moral (again, by the power of God). That is what Paul meant by “setting our mind.”

√ It has truly been said, “we are what we think.” So being “raised up with Christ” is to think as God would think. And we can do this because we “have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16) through revelation of God’s mind in His Holy Word.

CLOSING CHALLENGE

So, as Paul launches into the practical teaching of chapters 3 and 4 of Colossians, desiring us to understand that we are “complete in Christ,” he begins by challenging, no commanding, we who are “raised up with Christ” to (1) keep seeking the things above, and (2) set our mind on the things above.

Can we do that? Yes, by God’s Spirit in us. Will we do that? Will you do that? God awaits your response by action and thought.